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UNCLAS HARARE 001860

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/S  
USDOC FOR ROBERT TELCHIN  
TREASURY FOR OREN WYCHE-SHAW  
PASS USTR FLORIZELLE LISER  
STATE PASS USAID FOR MARJORIE COPSON

SENSITIVE

¶E. O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: ECON EAGR ETRD EINV PGOV ZI

SUBJECT: GOZ Seizes 4 White Farms this Week

Sensitive but unclassified. Not for Internet posting.

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Commercial Farmers Union (CFU) officials tell us the GOZ recently accelerated its acquisition of mostly-white commercial farms under fast-track land reform, causing four CFU members to lose their farms per week at present. However, the CFU officials note in that in the last three years farm expropriations always peaked around the October-November planting season and, accordingly, they expect the acquisition pace to slow in December. End summary.

500-600 Whites Still Farming

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¶2. (SBU) CFU Vice President Christopher Hawgood and Director Hendrik Oliver called on the Ambassador on November 10. They estimate that 500-600 whites are still farming in Zimbabwe, down from 4,500 in 2000. Although the CFU continues to lobby the Reserve Bank and Lands Ministry for a moratorium on farm seizures, they acknowledge that many dejected white farmers are reluctant to invest in new output and may abandon their farms after harvesting the current crop. Hawgood believes that the remaining white farmers have survived "by hook or by crook," steering clear of opposition politics and building ties to divergent elements within the ruling ZANU-PF. He insists the GOZ took over Kondozi Farm due to support that part-owner Peter de Klerk provided to the opposition MDC. (Note: Kondozi was a large horticulture exporting farm in the Eastern Highlands and employed 6,000 workers. In an ultimately unsuccessful bid to forestall expropriation, De Klerk sold 52 percent of the farm to black Zimbabwean businessman Edwin Moyo in 2003. The farm is now dormant.)

¶3. (SBU) The CFU Vice President noted that GOZ farm acquisitions have spiked in October-November over the past three years because prominent GOZ officials want to lay claim to farms after crops are already in the ground. "The pressure at this stage is boiling," he said. However, CFU officials expect the acquisition pace to slow again in December. CFU officials have also started providing Reserve Bank Governor Gideon Gono with a weekly report on allegedly unlawful seizures, but they do not believe Gono has had much impact halting the takeovers. CFU officials expect a dominant ZANU-PF victory in next March's parliamentary elections. They hope a less-threatened President Mugabe will dismiss Agriculture Minister Joseph Made, fast-track land reform's main architect, and impose a moratorium on future expropriations.

Comment

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¶4. (SBU) Like many eternally-hopeful Zimbabweans, CFU leaders believe the ruling ZANU-PF will adopt a more moderate course after it further marginalizes the MDC and consolidates its grip on power next March. The CFU, however, is unable to point to any evidence to support this optimistic prognosis. Time will tell whether this is a sound policy or starry-eyed optimism. Under the present leadership, CFU officials have begun to restore a relationship with the GOZ, by strategically disassociating from MDC partisanship and seeking increased access to moderates like Gono and Lands Minister John Nkomo. Yet these CFU officials still seem unwilling to address their broader image problem. Many Zimbabweans in and out of the GOZ regard the CFU as a white fraternity that never shed its Rhodesian allegiance. The CFU could win enormous goodwill - and possibly save some remaining white-owned farms - by using its formidable skills base to assist emerging black farmers (at least those who obtained farms before the GOZ's controversial fast-track land reform) and by reaching out to the mostly-black Indigenous Commercial Farmers Union (ICFU). It is uncertain, however, whether the farmer body will move in this direction.

